



## **COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES**

### **AYP NOTIFICATIONS UNDER NCLB**

August 23, 2005

TO: All Iowa Superintendents:

Schools and districts that do not make their NCLB achievement goals for two years will be notified next week by the state that they have been designated as a "School in Need of Assistance" (SINA) by the United States Department of Education.

As you know, the United States Department of Education requires you to notify your students' parents when you have been given the SINA designation, and to explain what services your school must offer their students, if any.

While this parent communication is obligatory, it provides a good opportunity to explain to your parents what the designation does and does not mean, and to reassure them your school remains a fully accredited school with quality curriculum and teaching staff.

It also is important to communicate this information to your other key audiences, such as school staff, school board, community leaders, and the media. All of these groups have a strong, vested interest in your school's success, and should be told directly about your school's NCLB status. It is best to get out in front of the issue and be proactive in your communication so you can help shape the information as well as the context in which it is delivered and received.

#### **Recommendations for school administrators:**

- Wait for confirmed information from the Iowa Department of Education before you start discussing or disseminating any lists of schools.
- Communicate first to key stakeholders such as teachers, parents, students and board members.
- Communicate next with key community leaders and business leaders.
- Provide the information to local media.
- Consider communicating from the district level rather than from each school in the district. This will help assure a consistent and more accurate message.

#### **Key Messages**

- Provide the facts about which goals you didn't meet, but keep it simple.
- Include information about which goals you DID meet; it's likely you successfully met goals in many more areas than not; this is important context to provide for all your audiences.



- If you are a Title I school, explain the services you will offer to students (either school transfer or supplemental services).
- If you are a non-Title 1 school, explain that you are not required to take any action at this time, but that you nonetheless have an improvement plan in place.
- Focus on your corrective action plan or what will happen, rather than the particulars and nuances of the Adequate Yearly Progress formula.
- Therefore, you must have your corrective plan well thought out, even if all the details are not yet in place. Use this opportunity to talk about your improvement goals and the strategies you are using.
- Ask for help and support in implementing the corrective plan; this expands the number of people who have a vested interest in its success.
- Provide regular updates to report your progress and provide assurance that you are on track.

#### Building Staff:

- Conduct information meetings in each building and invite all staff. This is complicated information, and can be frustrating and/or disheartening. Telling the news in person allows you to be more empathetic and to respond immediately to questions.
- Remind them of the positive work they've done, and reinforce that the school is not failing.
- Ask for their help in implementing corrections.
- Provide summary details in writing for them to refer to later.
- Provide talking points for them to use with parents.

#### Parents:

- You are required to send letters to the home via the mail informing parents 1) that you've been designated a SINA school, and b) what services you will offer students if you are a Title I school. In Iowa, because we have only Year 2 or Year 3 schools, those services will be either school transfer or supplemental services, or both. Remember, if you are a non-Title 1 school, you aren't required to offer these services.
- Include article in school newsletter or via PTA/PTO.
- Focus on the corrective plan and the benefits to students.
- Consider offering public meetings, depending on how much assurance parents need.

#### Students:

- Share the information at a uniform time to all students; for instance, during first hour.
- Use simple information and focus on the corrective action plan.

#### School Board

- Share the information in person or at a teleconference meeting so you can completely describe the situation and answer questions.
- Provide summary details in writing for them to refer to later.
- Provide talking points for them to use with community members and parents.

#### Community Leaders

- Inform the community and business leaders who provide support to the local schools. School administrators need to provide reassurance that the school/district is examining the data and will be proactive in meeting any challenges ahead.



- Focus the message on the corrective plan.
- Ask for their help in implementing the action plan.

#### Media

- Make sure that the education personnel and parents, if possible, have been told before the story is told by the media. This is a courtesy to your key stakeholders.
- The media will continue to report about this and other NCLB issues, so building strong relationships and providing accurate information is important.
- Provide the facts very simply, and focus on the future.
- Provide the information in writing to help ensure factual information.

#### **SEE ATTACHED COMMUNICATION SAMPLES:**

- Sample A: Letter to district staff from superintendent.
- Sample B: Letter to parents for Title I schools offering school choice
- Sample C: Letter to parents for Title I schools offering school transfer and supplemental services
- Sample D: Letter to parents for non-Title 1 school parents

#### **To use the samples:**

Be sure to customize each letter for your own district.

- Cut and paste the text onto your district or building letterhead.
- The yellow highlighted areas indicate information you should personalize.
- Insert or delete any of the text to adapt to your particular situations.

